

Doing What it Takes to Leave No Child Behind:

Creating Schools that Move Students from
“At-Risk” to “At-Promise”

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I. Distinguishing Between Symptoms and Causes

- High dropout rates and low achievement patterns are a symptom of larger systemic problems
- Many school reforms have not implemented with a clear focus on how they address the needs of the most vulnerable students
- Raising standards is unlikely to lead to better outcomes unless we improve learning conditions and respond more effectively to student needs
- We must recognize that poverty, family distress and external conditions have an impact on schools and student outcomes

What We Know

- Student achievement is affected by a variety of social, psychological and environmental factors
- Responding to student needs with services will not guarantee improved learning outcomes
- Changing academic outcomes requires a focus on the needs of the “whole child”

II. We need to change how schools respond to the needs of vulnerable students

- Challenge assumptions within schools about why certain students are likely to fail
 - Normalization of failure – race and class as predictors
 - Address the lack of a coherent strategy in struggling schools
- Provide schools with accurate information on student needs and guidance on how to respond
 - Identify at-risk students and target them with support before they get into trouble
- Develop greater clarity among policy makers about what might be done to improve struggling schools and districts
 - Shutting down schools cannot be the only solutions

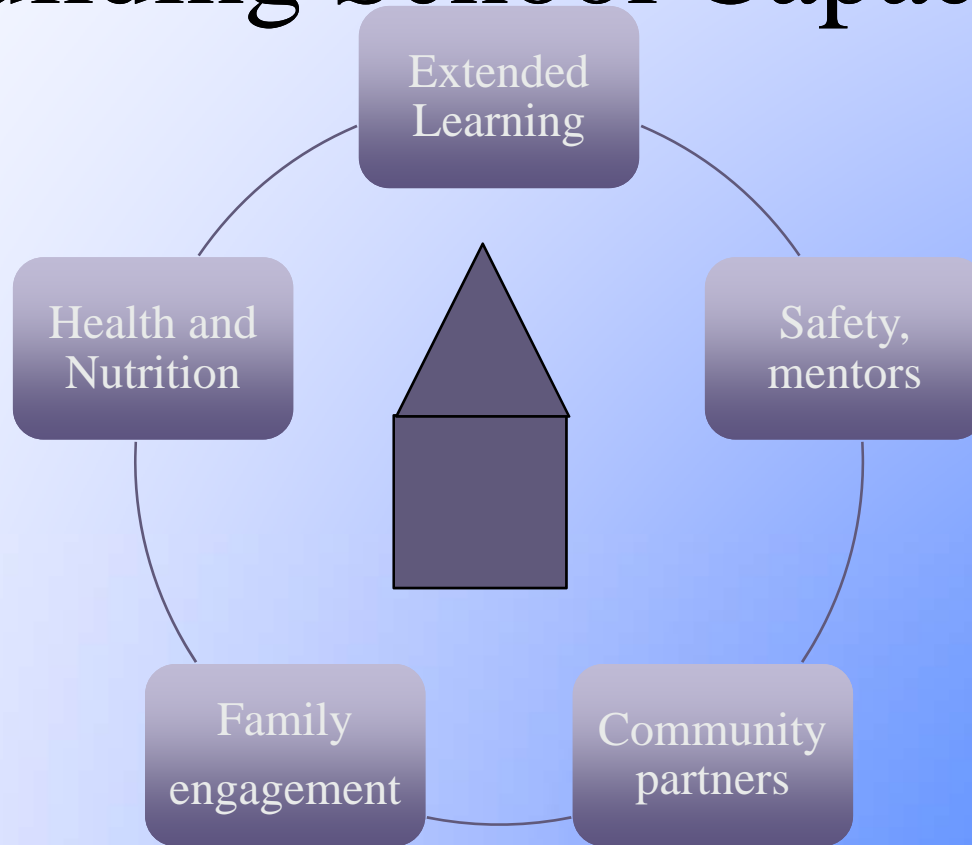
Building school capacity requires an understanding of how to:

- Build partnerships between schools and CBOs in response to health and social needs of children
 - Well developed service plan that is aligned to the academic plan
 - Transfer high schools in NY; Eagle Academy and 100 Black Men
- Design professional development for teachers based on student needs – ELL, adolescent literacy, etc. – Academy of Business and Technology, Bronx
- Intervene early and effectively in response to academic and social needs – Mott Haven Prep
- Personalize the learning environment –
 - Use of data systems to monitor performance – EPGY
- Engage parents in effective partnerships that reinforce child development and learning – McCormick Middle School, Boston, MA

We can't ignore the needs of any students

- Many affluent students are also “at-risk”
 - Drug use
 - Eating disorders
 - Depression
- All students must be encouraged to achieve their intellectual, artistic and athletic potential
 - Provide access to rigorous courses and learning opportunities
 - Personalize learning when possible
 - Focus on cultivating talent

Building School Capacity



III. What must be done to improve student achievement and reduce the dropout rate:

- Respond in a holistic manner to the needs of students by understanding:
 - Health and welfare needs
 - Social and emotional needs
 - Developmental challenges
 - Family and community challenges

Improve Teaching

- Move away from excessive reliance on lecture and test preparation
 - Interactive strategies - project-based learning, Socratic seminars, experiential learning, simulations, presentations
 - Collaborative planning time to analyze data and student work
 - Make class time work time – utilize active learning strategies, reduce reliance on homework,
- Mentoring and peer evaluation for teachers

Strategies for raising achievement and reducing dropout rates

- Case management for the most at-risk students
- Make curriculum more relevant to the lives of students
 - Career Academies - marketable skills that don't limit options
 - Socio-cultural relevance - build connections between what is learned and what is happening in their lives
 - Show how what is learned in school can help students to address real problems in their lives

Develop systems to respond to student needs

- Help students to develop concrete plans for the future early
 - Involve students in counseling about college early
 - Expose students to a variety of post-secondary options
- Build stronger ties between adults and students
 - Effective use of extracurricular activities
 - Develop small learning communities
 - Pro-active mentoring
 - Utilize every teacher as an advisor
- Credit recovery plans
 - Offer courses on Saturdays, evenings and in the summer for students who are behind